

S-E-C-R-E-T

28 June 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: George A. Carver, Jr., SAVA

SUBJECT : Chicago Sun-Times references to  
NIE of May 25, 1964

1. Identification. Attached hereto is a copy of SNIE 50-2-64 of 25 May 1964 (TS #0038277; Top Secret/Limited Distribution/Controlled Dissem) which is, indeed, one of the documents referred to in the Sun-Times article. We are certain of this because the article contains the quotation,

"Retaliatory measures which the North might take with Laos and South Vietnam might make it increasingly difficult for the US to regard its objectives as obtainable by limited means. Thus, difficulties of comprehension might increase on both sides as the scale of actions mounted."

The SNIE's paragraph 4 contains the identical statement except that the text opens with "Similarly, the retaliatory measures which Hanoi might take in Laos and South Vietnam...." And, later on in the SNIE text, the word "actions" is in the singular. It appears, therefore, that the Sun-Times utilized some sort of commentary on or summary of the SNIE rather than an exact copy of the SNIE itself.

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2. The other so-called quotation from this SNIE --  
[that the US would] "retain considerable leverage in Southeast Asia even if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control." -- is nowhere to be found in the SNIE text. A charitable view is that this fairly vague and meaningless statement is some interlocutor's rather tortured interpretation of Conclusion D's last two sentences, some sentiments in paragraph 18, and perhaps the last two sentences of paragraph 29. But it would be "tortured", in my view.

3. Substance. Indeed, to follow up this last point, it is difficult to know why this SNIE was tied into the Sun-Times story as one of those government pieces "rejecting the so-called domino theory." As indicated above, there was virtually no meaningful attention to this issue in the 25 May 1964 estimate cited by the Sun-Times.

4. Elsewhere, the Sun-Times is on somewhat better ground. Paragraphs 11 and 12 of the SNIE tend to support "pessimistic assessment(s) of the value of launching a bombing campaign against

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North Vietnam ." On the other hand, paragraphs 21-22, despite something of a balancing act, certainly do not argue that "Hanoi's will" is unbreakable; and paragraphs 16-17 and 23-24 argue against the Sun-Times assertion that bombing attacks on the North "carried the danger of escalating the war into a direct confrontation with Communist China and the Soviet Union."

5. In sum, the newspaper article contains a highly slanted version of the reasoning in SNIE 50-2-64; it utilizes one reasonably accurate quotation but is apparently founded on a distorted interpretation of the estimate's true content.

6. Genesis of the SNIE. According to the ONE record (attached), this SNIE was requested by the State Department of [ ] then Chief of ONE's Far East Staff, apparently on a rush basis only a few days before the actual publication date. [ ] recollection is that this SNIE was one of the many requested during the period by the Rostow/Sullivan Special Working Group on Vietnam. The SNIE was drafted by [ ] and Carver, and received urgent USIB coordination on 25 May. Distribution was apparently quite limited.

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